LOEB
LEE
WILLIAMS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
616 AUG 2003
BATMAN
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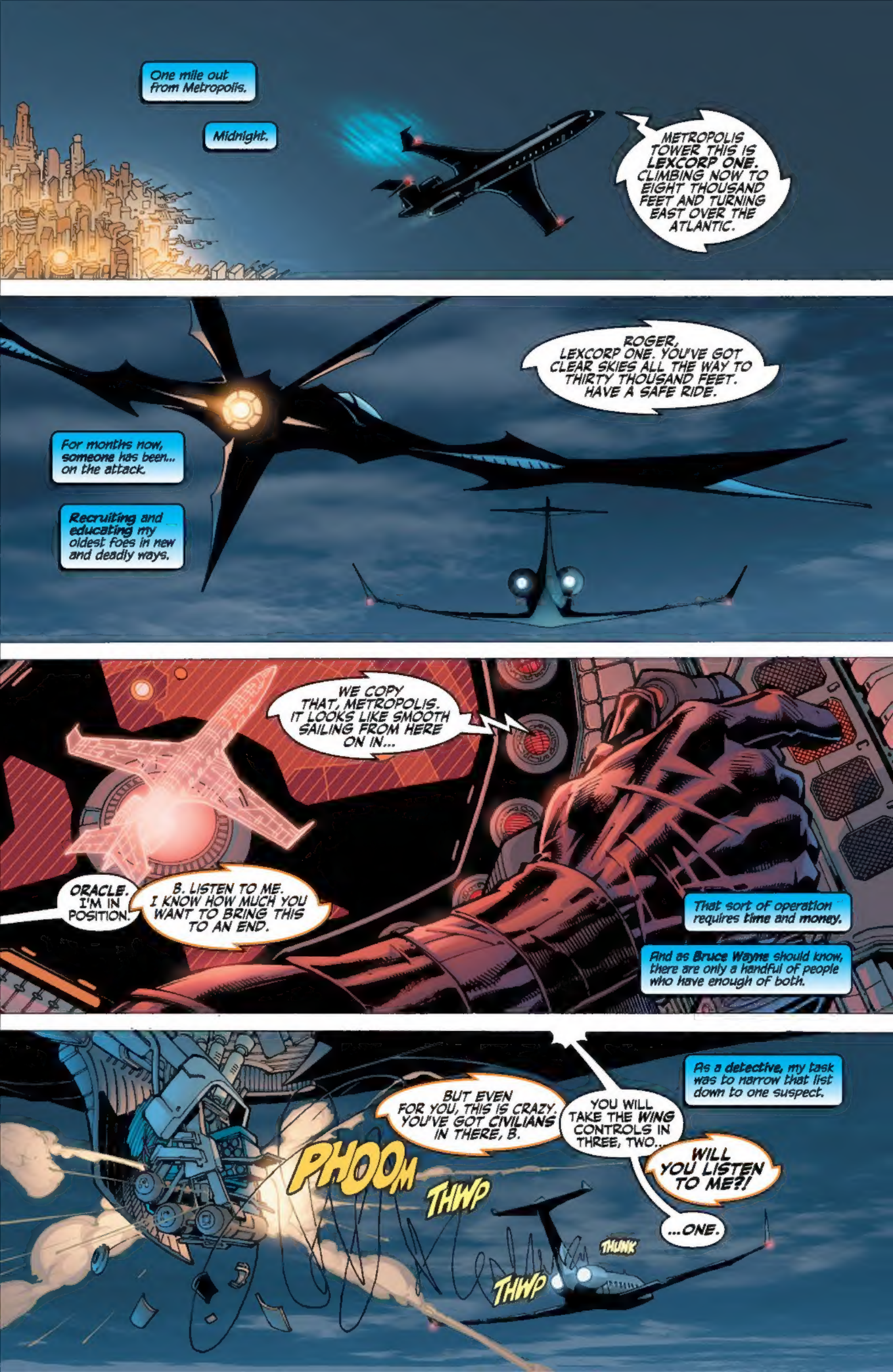

One mile out from Metropolis.
Midnight.
METROPOLIS TOWER THIS IS LEXCORP ONE. CLIMBING NOW TO EIGHT THOUSAND FEET AND TURNING EAST OVER THE ATLANTIC.
ROGER, LEXCORP ONE. YOU'VE GOT CLEAR SKIES ALL THE WAY TO THIRTY THOUSAND FEET. HAVE A SAFE RIDE.
For months now, someone has been... on the attack.
Recruiting and educating my oldest foes in new and deadly ways.
WE COPY THAT, METROPOLIS. IT LOOKS LIKE SMOOTH SAILING FROM HERE ON IN...
ORACLE. I'M IN POSITION.
B. LISTEN TO ME. I KNOW HOW MUCH YOU WANT TO BRING THIS TO AN END.
That sort of operation requires time and money.
And as Bruce Wayne should know, there are only a handful of people who have enough of both.
As a detective, my task was to narrow that list down to one suspect.
BUT EVEN FOR YOU, THIS IS CRAZY. YOU'VE GOT CIVILIANS IN THERE, B.
YOU WILL TAKE THE WING CONTROLS IN THREE, TWO...
WILL YOU LISTEN TO ME?!
...ONE.
PHOOM
THWP
THUNK
THWP

The time has come to take the battle back to its source.

OKAY, I'VE GOT THE WING. SHE'LL BE SAFELY RETURNED TO THE BASE. WHICH IS MORE THAN I CAN SAY FOR --

KEEP TO THE PLAN, O.

The LexCorp Gulf Stream 5 has the same specifications as WayneTech's Air Glide 3.

Lucius tells me that we'll be in court for years over patent infringement.

CHk

Door sealed

GOOD LORD... WE'VE GOT A FAILURE IN THE REAR CABIN DOOR --!

Door breached

SHOOM

LEXCO

Having knowledge of the inner workings of the aircraft gives me the edge.

It's one of the few times I'm grateful for the way LexCorp does business.

O. I'M IN.

AND I'M LESS THAN THRILLED AT JAMMING A DISTRESS CALL. EVEN THEIRS.

MAYDAY -- METROPOLIS TOWER -- THIS IS LEXCORP ONE. WE--VZZZZT--

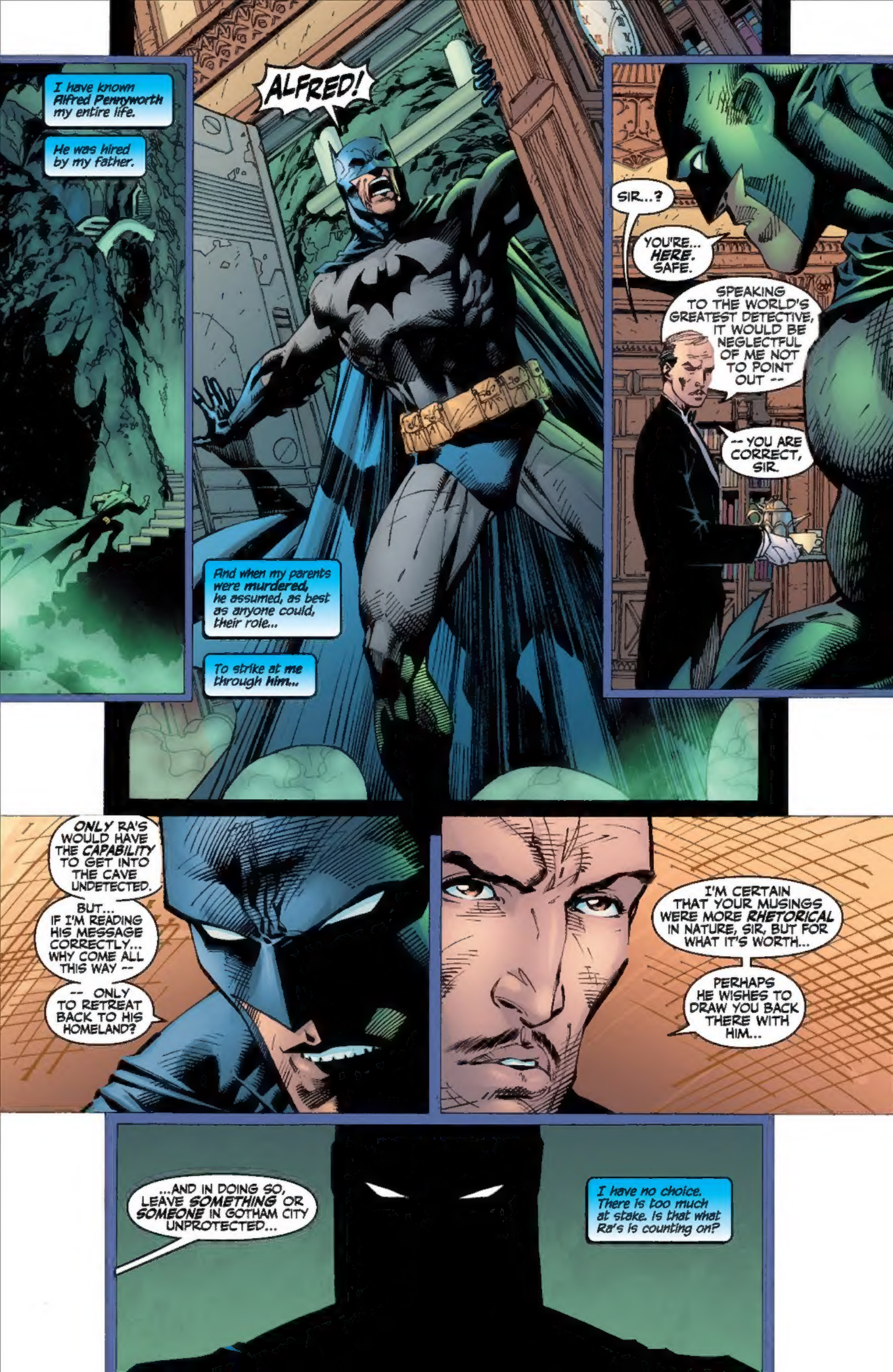
Heat sensor activated.
Traveling at this velocity, an experienced pilot will decrease altitude as slowly as possible to counteract the loss of cabin pressure.
The bodyguards will have been instructed not to fire their weapons onboard to keep from rupturing the hull.
I have less than one minute to get in and out before the cabin door automatically reseals itself.
Heat sensor OFF.
But, by then, I will have taken what I came for.
ONLY YOU WOULD BE SO BRAZEN.
Only here would she be so vulnerable.
SLASH
YOUR MOVE.
BELOVED.

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
Talia Head. Ra's al Ghul's daughter.
Jeph LOEB writes
Jim LEE pencils
Scott WILLIAMS inks
Richard STARKINGS letters
Alex SINCLAIR colors
Bob SCHRECK edits
Michael WRIGHT associate edits
special thanks to Mark CHIARELLO
I made a promise on the grave of my parents to rid this city of the evil that took their lives. By day, I am Bruce Wayne, billionaire philanthropist. At night, criminals, a cowardly and superstitious lot, call me
BATMAN
CREATED BY BOB KANE
HUSH
Chapter Nine THE ASSASSINS

ASK YOUR FATHER.
One night, years ago, Robin -- Dick Grayson before he became Nightwing -- was ambushed inside his dorm room.
MY FATHER AND I NO LONGER SPEAK.
BUT, YOU KNEW THAT.
No one had seen or heard anything. It was as though he just vanished.
VURRNNN
ESTRANGED OR NOT, HE WILL NOT ALLOW FOR YOU TO BE HURT.
Finally, I was contacted -- not as Batman, but as Bruce Wayne.
YOU WILL NEVER HURT ME, MY LOVE.
I AM NOT YOUR "LOVE."
His kidnapper had uncovered my secret identity and challenged me to find and rescue Dick.
It turned out to be a test staged by her father to see if I was a worthy suitor for Talia.
VRROOOM
That is how I first met Ra's al Ghul...

Oracle worries my actions this evening will have repercussions.
I'm counting on it.
MISTER PRESIDENT...!
The White House. Sometime after midnight.
Where -- as incredible as it sounds -- Lex Luthor is the President of The United States.
SIR... THERE'S BEEN A HIJACKING AND KIDNAPPING --
-- ABOARD LEXCORP ONE.
MISTER VICE PRESIDENT.
PETE. YOU KNOW HOW CAREFUL I HAVE TO BE REGARDING MY FORMER... HOLDINGS.
CORPORATE ESPIONAGE IS THE PRICE OF DOING BUSINESS. I'M SURPRISED THAT MS. HEAD --
IT WAS BATMAN, SIR.
WE HAVE CONFIRMATION THROUGH SATCOM.
IT WAS SOME SORT OF BAT-SHAPED AIRCRAFT.
WITH A CLOAKING DEVICE MAKING IT ESSENTIALLY AN INVISIBLE PLANE.
DO YOU WISH TO TAKE ACTION?
NOT...
...YET.

It is nearly 3:00 am by the time I return to the cave. I have left Talia... elsewhere.
She is unharmed and where no one can find her.
My message has been received...
...However, Ra's has responded even more quickly than I expected.
If he — accompanied by any of his League of Assassins were here, then —
ALFRED!


I have known Alfred Pennyworth my entire life.
He was hired by my father.
ALFRED!
And when my parents were murdered, he assumed, as best as anyone could, their role...
To strike at me through him...
SIR...?
YOU'RE... HERE. SAFE.
SPEAKING TO THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE, IT WOULD BE NEGLECTFUL OF ME NOT TO POINT OUT --
-- YOU ARE CORRECT, SIR.
ONLY RA'S WOULD HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO GET INTO THE CAVE UNDETECTED.
BUT... IF I'M READING HIS MESSAGE CORRECTLY... WHY COME ALL THIS WAY --
-- ONLY TO RETREAT BACK TO HIS HOMELAND?
I'M CERTAIN THAT YOUR MUSINGS WERE MORE RHETORICAL IN NATURE, SIR, BUT FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH...
PERHAPS HE WISHES TO DRAW YOU BACK THERE WITH HIM...
...AND IN DOING SO, LEAVE SOMETHING OR SOMEONE IN GOTHAM CITY UNPROTECTED...
I have no choice. There is too much at stake. Is that what Ra's is counting on?

Jim Gordon's home.
The Former Police Commissioner.

TICK
TOCK
TICK

TICK
TOCK
TI--

HANDS IN THE AIR.
YOU THINK YOU CAN BREAK INTO MY HOME --

PUT THE GUN DOWN, JIMBO.
I JUST WANT TO TALK.
TWO-FACE...!
NO. IT'S ME.
HARVEY DENT.

THE MAN I KNEW AS HARVEY DENT IS DEAD.
HE WAS LOST TO A DERANGED LUNATIC NAMED TWO-FACE.
IS THAT HOW IT IS, JIMBO?
NO SECOND CHANCES?
IN YOUR CASE, YOU'VE GOTTEN SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH CHANCES, AND YOU BURNED THEM ALL.
OKAY, I DESERVED THAT. BUT I DIDN'T COME HERE TONIGHT FOR ME.
IT'S BATS.
HE NEEDS OUR HELP. NOW, MORE THAN EVER.
IT'S GOING TO TAKE A LITTLE MORE THAN SOME PLASTIC SURGERY TO MAKE ME BELIEVE YOU'VE CHANGED SIDES.
I HEARD ABOUT THAT STUNT YOU PULLED OUT AT ARKHAM. GETTING THE JOKER RELEASED.
POSING AS HIS ATTORNEY.
I'VE HAD MY LICENSE REINSTATED BY THE STATE.
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
IS IT?
THE JOKER WAS INNOCENT. YOU KNOW THAT.
YOU WERE THERE IN THE ALLEY.
YOU STOPPED BATMAN FROM KILLING HIM.
THE PHONE CALL THAT TOLD YOU TO GO THERE. TELL ME YOU DIDN'T RECOGNIZE MY VOICE.
...
WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT?
THE GUN THAT KILLED TOMMY ELLIOT.
WHEN IT'S FOUND, IT WILL BE TRACED BACK TO YOU.
IT'S YOUR SERVICE REVOLVER. THE ONE YOU TURNED IN WHEN YOU RETIRED.
HOW COULD YOU KNOW A THING LIKE THAT?
IT'S ALL PART OF A GAME.
LIKE IT OR NOT, WE'RE TWO OF THE PIECES.
THE QUESTION IS...
...HOW MUCH LONGER DO YOU WANT TO PLAY?

The camel's bridle on the hilt of the sword.
One of my earliest encounters with Ra's began with my finding one he had left behind.
It brought me here, to North Africa, as it has again.
WHERE IS MY DAUGHTER...
...DETECTIVE?
SAFE.
YOU THINK I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR RECENT...
...MISFORTUNES. THE DEATH OF YOUR FRIEND THOMAS ELLIOT, FOR EXAMPLE.
YOU ARE MISTAKEN.
YOU HAVE MEANS.
OPPORTUNITY.
AND KNOWLEDGE ONLY A FEW POSSESS...
...ABOUT MY PERSONAL LIFE.
I WILL MAKE YOU A PROPOSITION.
IF YOU DEFEAT ME HERE THIS EVENING, I WILL HELP SOLVE YOUR... DILEMMA.
SHOULD I TRIUMPH, HOWEVER, MY DAUGHTER IS TO BE RELEASED --
-- AND YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS INSUBORDINATION WITH YOUR --

KLANK
--LIFE!
Intentionally or not, Ra's reminded me of when my childhood friend, Tommy Elliot, and I would play war with small pewter figures.
How Tommy would chastise me for not thinking like my opponent -- acting as the enemy would.
SO. APPARENTLY A LEOPARD CAN CHANGE ITS SPOTS.
KLANK
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR AMERICAN WAY OF WAITING FOR YOUR OPPONENT TO BE READY?
Ra's has never -- would never -- relent in his attack.
PERHAPS MY METAPHOR WAS INAPPROPRIATE.
NOT A LEOPARD, BUT A SNAKE THAT HAS SHED HIS SKIN, REVEALING HIS TRUE SELF.
THEN, COME, DETECTIVE. SHOW ME WHAT YOU HAVE BECOME.
I cannot give up my ground. I've put too much at risk...

Selina...
back in Gotham City.
I CAN SMELL HIM ON YOU.
LOVERS CAN SENSE THAT SORT OF THING.
YOU CAN NEVER HAVE HIM, YOU KNOW.
I KNOW YOU'RE AWAKE.
CATS CAN SENSE THAT SORT OF THING.
I'VE MADE IT THIS FAR IN LIFE WITHOUT HAVING TO "HAVE" SOMEONE.
SO, WHATEVER INFORMATION YOU THINK YOU'RE TRADING ON --
-- THEN, YOU HAVEN'T MADE LOVE WITH HIM YET.
I OFFERED TO BABYSIT YOU.
HIDE YOU WHERE DADDY CAN'T FIND YOU.
THEN YOU BOTH HAVE FOOLISHLY UNDERESTIMATED MY FATHER.
THERE WEREN'T ANY SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS THAT SAID I COULDN'T GAG YOU.
MRRROW

RELEASE HER --
OH, HELL...
I did not have to ask. When Selina realized what I intended to do...
...She told me she would keep Talia out of reach.
-- AND I WILL SPARE YOUR LIFE.
GNNNH
LADY SHIVA.
WHAT AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.
I could have used Dick. Gone to Blüdhaven. But, Selina put it simply --
"If we're going to be in each other's lives...
"...We need to be in each other's lives."
TALIA STAYS.
YOU GO.
REMEMBER.
I GAVE YOU A CHOICE.
In choosing to reveal myself as Bruce Wayne, I have decided to trust her.
What I should have expected, but am still... appreciating...is that she trusts me.

I cannot -- will not -- fail her trust.
YOU'VE CERTAINLY FOUND THE PASSION FOR THE GAME.
WHOEVER HAS MANIPULATED YOU INTO THIS FRAME OF MIND, THEY ARE TO BE COMMENDED.
THIS.
IS.
NOT.
A.
SLASH
GAME!

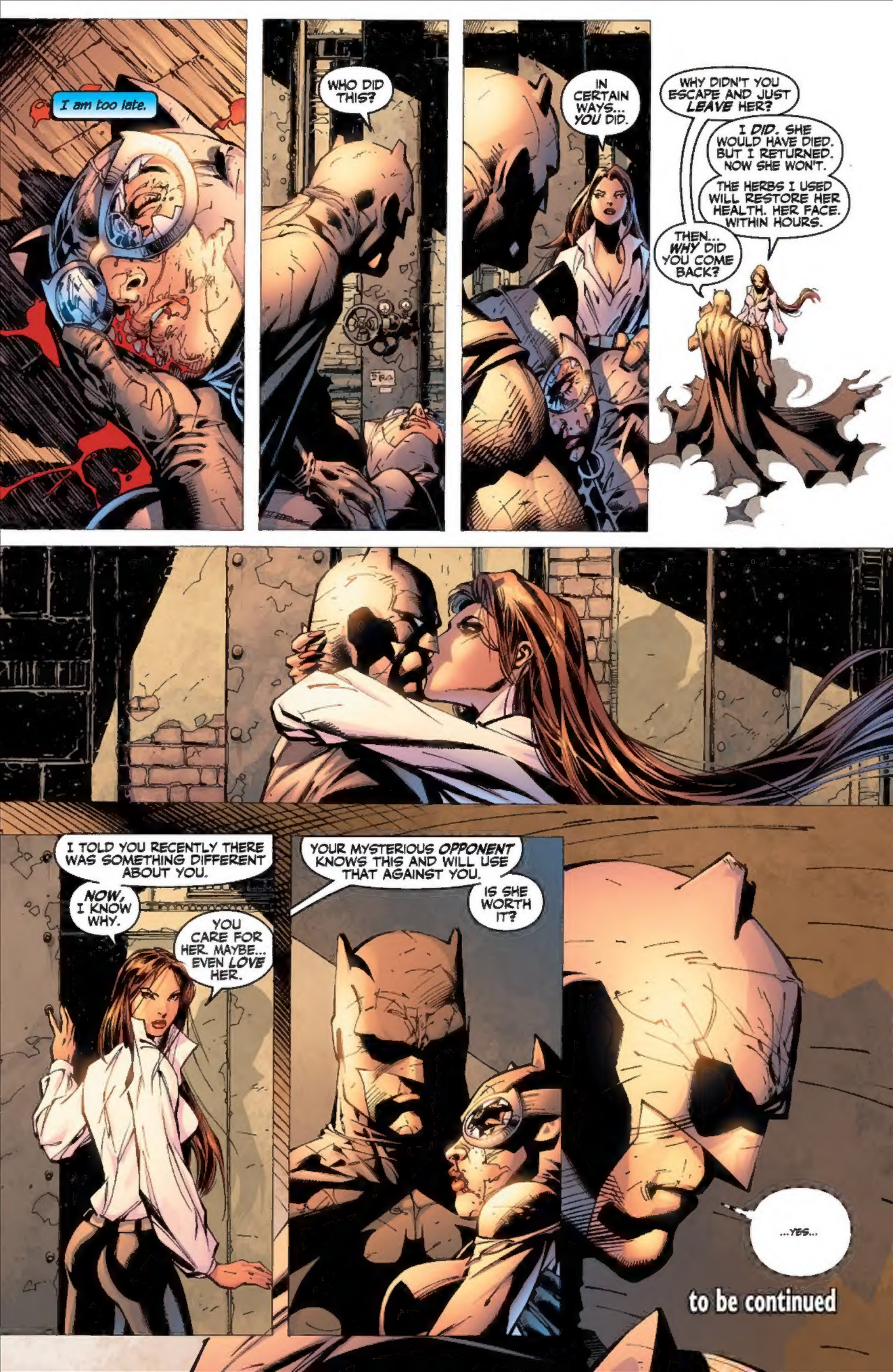
THWAP
THWAP
THWAP
THWAP
THWAP
THWAP
WHACK
YOU CANNOT DEFEAT HER.
SHE IS A MASTER ASSASSIN. PERHAPS, THE DEADLIEST OF MY FATHER'S --
SHUT UP, YOU.
TCATSCH

SLISH
Think like the enemy.
FLIP
FLP
GAH!
CHK
TOHUK
And to do so... without becoming the enemy.
IT IS OVER, RA'S.
NOW -- TELL ME.

KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
KLK
SHOOM
SHOOM
SHOOM
SHOOM
THE TIME IT WILL TAKE FOR YOUR ASSASSINS TO STOP ME --
-- YOU COULD SPEND GETTING TO MEDICAL HELP...
...OR TO A LAZARUS PIT.
WELL PLAYED, DETECTIVE.
I HAVE ENTERTAINED YOU THIS EVENING BECAUSE WE SEEK THE SAME PERSON WHOSE IDENTITY I DO NOT KNOW.
SO, YOU SEE... YOUR PROBLEM HAS BECOME MY PROBLEM...
...AND IT SUITS ME TO HAVE YOU SOLVE IT FOR US BOTH.
SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING LAZARUS PITS WAS DEFILED.
AS YOU KNOW, ONCE THE LIFE-RESTORING ENERGIES HAVE BEEN TAPPED, THE PIT ITSELF IS RENDERED USELESS.
ASK YOURSELF, DETECTIVE...
...WHO IN YOUR LIFE WOULD WISH TO COME BACK FROM THE DEAD?
I must return to Gotham City.

ASK YOURSELF, CATWOMAN...
FAP
HGNNN
IS HE PAYING YOU TO KEEP TALIA NEARLY WHAT I AM BEING PAID TO STEAL HER FROM YOU?
WKISH
NO...?
I DIDN'T THINK SO.
DKU SH
I ONLY ALLOWED THIS FIGHT TO CONTINUE TO TEST YOUR METTLE.
WHY BATMAN WOULD TRUST YOU REMAINS A MYSTERY TO ME.
BUT, YOUR DEATH WILL KEEP ME FROM WONDERING ABOUT IT FOR TOO --

TELL MY FATHER.
SHMACK
WAK
TO STAY OUT OF MY LIFE.
GAMES...
VZZZZZP


I am too late.
WHO DID THIS?
IN CERTAIN WAYS... YOU DID.
WHY DIDN'T YOU ESCAPE AND JUST LEAVE HER?
I DID. SHE WOULD HAVE DIED. BUT I RETURNED. NOW SHE WON'T.
THE HERBS I USED WILL RESTORE HER HEALTH. HER FACE. WITHIN HOURS.
THEN... WHY DID YOU COME BACK?
I TOLD YOU RECENTLY THERE WAS SOMETHING DIFFERENT ABOUT YOU.
NOW, I KNOW WHY.
YOU CARE FOR HER. MAYBE... EVEN LOVE HER.
YOUR MYSTERIOUS OPPONENT KNOWS THIS AND WILL USE THAT AGAINST YOU.
IS SHE WORTH IT?
...YES...
to be continued

RIZZ3N
EMPIRE